

September 20, 2002

River District Approves Additional Water Supply Measures

Glenwood Springs, CO - The Colorado River Water Conservation District's Board of Directors approved two more plans to keep water flowing in the Colorado River Basin as the drought of 2002 enters into the historical low-flow months. Anticipated calls on West Slope rivers during the winter have the potential to shut-off some domestic water users and impair the ability of many small West Slope reservoirs to store critical winter water. Recognizing the risks to domestic and municipal water supplies, West Slope senior water rights holders are working to eliminate the threats posed by a call on the river.

The first agreement ceases use of water for power generation by Redlands Water and Power Company from the Gunnison River near Grand Junction until river flows increase with next spring's run-off. Redlands Water and Power will be compensated for the loss of power generation revenues, which pay for operation of their water system, in order to remove their senior calling rights from the Gunnison River. A Redlands call would shut off junior water users when river flows are at their lowest and would eliminate the possibility of reservoirs throughout the Gunnison Basin storing water for next year. Effects of this action will be felt from low-lying areas of Mesa County, up through the Uncompahgre Plateau and North Fork of the Gunnison, and into the upper reaches of the Gunnison River in Gunnison County. An agreement reached earlier this summer very successfully curtailed Redlands' water usage heading into the heart of this year's drought, permitting additional water to be stored in upstream reservoirs.

The second pact involves a voluntary reduction of water usage at the Cameo hydroelectric plant owned by the federal government east of Grand Junction. If this senior water right were to exercise its full right to Colorado River water, water users stretching up into the West Slope's winter resort regions would have their winter water supply threatened during the ski season. This reduction is being negotiated with the Grand Valley Water Users Association, the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Winter power operations at the Cameo plant normally provide additional revenue for these entities. Unavailability of water supplies in upstream reservoirs precludes additional water releases that could provide relief from downstream calls this winter.

The Redlands and Cameo agreements are the latest in a long series of arrangements fashioned by the River District and other West Slope water users and water management agencies to keep water flowing to the greatest number of water users. The uninterrupted flow of water for many West Slope households has been made possible by numerous cooperative arrangements throughout the West Slope during the worst drought year in the recorded history of Colorado.